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SALVAGE OF USED CONTAINERS BY SMALL RETAILERS IN NEW YORK CITY, 1943

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A growing shortage of new containers, due to the diversion of lumber to war needs and to the increased production of perishable farm products, has increased the dependency of growers and shippers upon used containers. To determine the possibilities of increasing the salvage of wooden containers in New York City, a survey was conducted by the College of the City of New York^{1/} covering the period, April-August, 1943. Small produce retailers (those having stores manned by a staff of fewer than five persons)^{2/} were interviewed. This class of retailer was chosen on the assumption that such retailers salvaged relatively few containers, and consequently were the greatest potential source of increasing the supply of used containers.

A representative sample of 258 stores was selected^{3/} in the five boroughs of New York City. Information was obtained on the disposal of wooden containers received at each store during the month previous to the interview.

During the interview period, a total of 63,500 wooden containers for agricultural products per month were emptied at the 258 stores, an average of 246 per store. Approximately one-third of the containers emptied were bushel baskets, one-eighth were orange crates, and another eighth were bruce boxes. Proportions of other types of containers are shown in table 1.

Table 1 Containers for Agricultural Products Handled Per Month by Small Emptiers, April - August, 1943

Type of container	Containers emptied			Number of stores emptying each type
	Total		Average number per store ^{a/}	
	Number	Percent		
Total	63,552	100.0	246	258
Bushel basket	20,150	31.7	94	215
Orange crate	8,611	13.6	42	204
Bruce box	7,909	12.4	55	145
Climax basket	6,712	10.6	65	104
Hamper	6,091	9.6	42	144
Apple box	4,547	7.2	34	132
Egg crate	1,712	2.7	23	74
Butter tub	285	.4	22	13
Other types ^{b/}	7,535	11.8	53	143

a/ The total number of containers emptied per store is the average for all containers and all stores whereas, for individual types, only the number of stores emptying a given type of container is considered.

b/ Other types: Cauliflower crates, unclassified lettuce crates, berry crates, eastern or New York lettuce crates, splint or weave baskets, and similar types.

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1/ This study was prompted by a suggestion of the Office of Distribution, War Food Administration to the Social Research Laboratory of the College of the City of New York, upon inquiry on how the College could contribute to the war food program. Interviews were made by students of C.C.N.Y.; the analysis was made by the Program Appraisal Division, Office of Distribution, War Food Administration.

2/ All sample stores handled fresh produce but may have also handled other foods.

3/ At random from purposively chosen market areas in New York City.

About three-fourths of the retail emptiers reported on the disposition of specific types of containers. They reported concerning the disposition of about 50,000 containers, of which 64 percent were sold, 10 percent were damaged beyond re-use in shipping or opening, and 26 percent were disposed of in other ways (figure 1). It is assumed here that the 26 percent, neither sold nor irreparably damaged in shipping or opening, constitutes the major source of potential salvage. This salvagable one-fourth includes containers that were: (a) discarded by being burned, (b) left at customers' homes with deliveries, (c) filled with ashes or garbage, (d) damaged through re-use in the store, (e) given away for kindling, or (f) simply thrown away. Some of them may have been ultimately salvaged at garbage dumps or elsewhere but the extent was not ascertained in this study. Consequently, the salvagable portion may be less than one-fourth of the containers emptied. However, the 10 percent reported as damaged in shipping or opening also constitutes a potential source of re-usable containers. Therefore, an effective campaign to increase the supply of containers might be aimed at salvaging the one-fourth of the containers handled which are now wasted.

Containers found to be most often damaged beyond re-use in shipping or opening were: Bruce boxes, bushel baskets, climax baskets, and orange crates. Those which were most often discarded (other means of disposal) were bushel baskets and orange crates. Bushel baskets accounted for more than one-half of all discards, and orange crates represented more than one-eighth of the containers so wasted (table 2). A campaign to increase salvage might profitably be focused on bushel baskets because of the relatively great waste of this type of container, its adaptability to a variety of uses, and the great demand for it. However, salvage of other types of containers should also be encouraged. The data indicate that a comprehensive campaign to save all types of marketable containers would be fruitful.

Few produce retailers reported the disposition of container covers. Most retailers, who reported, salvaged about three-fourths of the covers received. Salvage was greatest for covers used on bushel baskets, hampers, and climax baskets. The number of stores salvaging different percentages of various types of covers salvaged are shown in table 3.

Table 3 Number of Stores Salvaging Container Covers by Types of Covers and Percent of Covers Salvaged, April-August, 1943

Percent of covers salvaged	Number of stores by types of covers salvaged							
	Bushel baskets	Orange crates	Bruce boxes	Climax baskets	Hampers	Apple boxes	Egg crates	Butter tubs
Total	80	19	26	24	44	16	22	5
1 - 50	15	4	2	2	5	-	4	-
51 - 75	10	2	6	1	6	1	2	-
76 - 100	55	13	18	21	33	15	16	5

Sales outlets for used containers were principally commercial accumulators such as "junkies" and bona fide container dealers who maintain storage and repair facilities. About 90 percent of all emptiers returned their used containers through these channels: 5 percent returned their containers direct

Table 2 Disposition of Wooden Containers per Month in Small Retail Stores by Type of Container

April - August, 1943

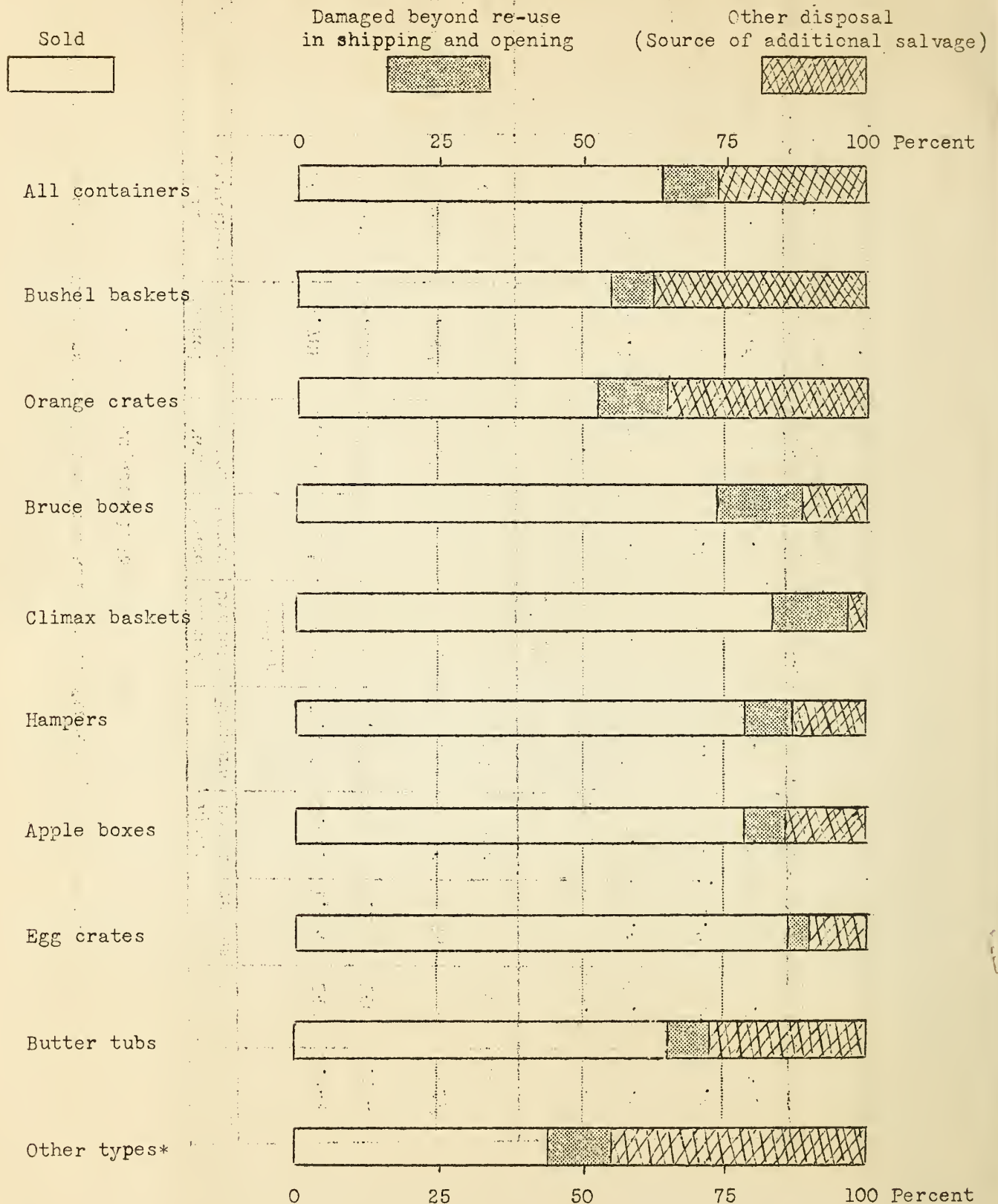
Disposition	All containers	Bushei baskets	Orange crates	Bruce boxes	Climax baskets	Hampers	Apple boxes	Egg crates	Butter tubs	Other types ^{a/}
Total	50,748	19,785	5,029	7,175	4,610	5,117	3,551	1,493	246	3,742
Sold	32,598	10,891	2,656	5,292	3,846	4,025	2,796	1,288	160	1,644
Damaged beyond re-use in handling and opening	4,971	1,447	634	1,089	611	426	266	58	19	421
Other disposal ^{b/}	13,179	7,447	1,739	794	153	666	489	147	67	1,677
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Sold	64.2	55.1	52.8	73.8	83.4	78.7	78.7	86.3	65.0	43.9
Damaged beyond re-use in handling and opening	9.8	7.3	12.6	15.2	13.3	8.3	7.5	3.9	7.7	11.3
Other disposal ^{b/}	26.0	37.6	34.6	11.0	3.3	13.0	13.8	9.8	27.3	44.8

^{a/} Other types: Cauliflower crates, unclassified lettuce crates, berry crates, eastern or New York lettuce crates, splint or weave baskets, and similar types.

^{b/} Discarded by being burned, left at customers' homes with deliveries, filled with ashes or garbage and so forth.

Figure 1

Disposition of Wooden Containers for Agricultural Products
by Small Emptiers in New York City, April - August, 1943



*Other types: Cauliflower, unclassified lettuce crates, berry crates, eastern or New York lettuce crates, splint or weave baskets, and similar types

to farmers, and another 5 percent to produce wholesalers. The outlets used as the principal salvage channels appear in table 4.

Table 4 Stores Using Various Types of Outlets for Used Containers
April-August, 1943

Type of outlet	Stores	
	Number	Percent
Total	188	100.0
Commercial dealers	167	88.8
Farmers	9	4.8
Produce wholesalers	10	5.3
Miscellaneous	2	1.1

Intervals between collections of containers at the stores varied from a day to a month. At more than 40 percent of the stores, containers were picked up once a week; at 20 percent, every two weeks (table 5).

Table 5 Frequency of Container Collection at Small Retail Stores

Frequency of collection	Stores	
	Number	Percent
Total	251	100.0
Not picked up at store	24	9.6
Daily	12	4.8
Twice a week	19	7.6
Once a week	107	42.5
Every two weeks	55	21.9
Once a month	21	8.4
Other intervals	13	5.2

Prices received by emptiers varied greatly for particular types of containers. Apple box and egg crate prices ranged from 1 to 13 cents. Bruce boxes, hampers, and bushel baskets ranged in price from 1 to 9 cents.^{4/} Most sales were considerably below OPA ceiling prices allowed to emptiers. The average selling price and the price range for each type of container are reported in table 6.

^{4/} Specific OPA ceiling prices were not established until July 26, 1943, when the GLPR basis of March, 1942 was replaced by dollars-and-cents prices.

Table 6 Average Prices Received by Small Emptiers for Used
Wooden Containers, May - August, 1943

Type of container ^{1/}	Average price received (cents)	Range of at least 65 percent of prices (cents)
Bushel basket	3.8	2.6 - 4.9
Orange crate	3.6	1.8 - 5.5
Bruce box	3.5	2.0 - 5.0
Climax basket	2.6	1.5 - 3.8
Hamper	2.7	1.5 - 4.0
Apple box	5.9	3.5 - 8.4
Egg crate	8.6	6.7 - 11.0

^{1/} Data for butter tubs were insufficient.

Recommendations

Small produce retailers in New York City constitute a potential source of additional used containers for agricultural products. It appears that about one-fourth of the containers, emptied by these retailers, are now wasted. Because of the present need for containers, an intensive campaign urging greater salvage should be launched immediately. The campaign should emphasize both the urgency of the need for containers and the maximum allowable price that retailers (emptiers) may receive under OFA regulations. Used-container dealers and civic organizations should be encouraged to cooperate in the drive by purchasing and assembling containers from small retailers. Container dealers have seldom employed advertising media to implement salvage operations. They do not fully appreciate the value of promotion as a means of increasing their supply of containers nor do they apparently wish to expend funds on advertising. Therefore, some Government agency should initiate a campaign.